

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF CUBA: BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND EXTINCTION

Margalit Bejarano

The rise and subsequent decline of the Cuban Jewish community in the twentieth century embodies a unique chapter in the study of diaspora Jewry. Beginning with a group of U.S. Jews in a Spanish-speaking society, home to Ladino-speaking immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, a haven for Jews fleeing the Holocaust, witness to a mass exodus in the wake of the Castro Revolution, the Cuban Jewish community today continues to maintain a limited Jewish communal life under difficult conditions. Because Cuba lacks any tradition of religious antisemitism, there is no reported local antisemitic feeling, even though Cuba has taken a prominent anti-Zionist stand. Factors that threaten its disappearance as an organized community include demographic decline due to emigration, aging and assimilation; the lack of spiritual leadership; the poverty of Jewish educational and cultural activities; and the hostility of the majority society toward identification with religious institutions.

Introduction

Cuba presents the only case of a Jewish community living under a communist regime in the Western Hemisphere. Since *perestroika* and the fall of communist governments in Eastern Europe, Cuba seems to be preparing itself to be the last fortress of Marxism in the world. Indeed, Fidel Castro portrays himself as the successor to one of Cuba's greatest heroes, Antonio Maceo, who refused to compromise his principles during the War of Liberation against colonial Spain.¹

Direct links between the present regime and the fight for national independence are deeply rooted in the revolutionary thought that seeks its ideological justification in the writings of Jose Marti,² and interprets Cuba's history as a continuous process of revolution. Similarly, one should not view the situation of Cuba's Jewish community as a mere replica of its Eastern European counterparts, but rather as the fruit of an encounter between former Cuban characteristics — shaped by ethnic composition, geographic setting and historical experience — and the influence exercised by the Soviet Union and other political factors, such as hostility towards the U.S. and alliance with the PLO.

The identification of Fidel Castro with the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism was followed by a mass exodus of upper and middle class

Jewish Political Studies Review 3:1–2 (Spring 1991)

Cubans, which included the majority of the Jews, whose community seems to have been transplanted to Florida's Dade County. Nevertheless, Jewish life in Cuba continued to exist, and a variety of social and religious institutions functioned under the auspices of the communist regime. The remaining community, however, has been constantly declining in strength and number, and it struggles to survive in an atmosphere of political hostility towards its former sources of inspiration — Israel and U.S. Jewry.

Analyzing the situation and organizational patterns of the present community, several questions arise: How did the revolution and exile affect the demographic composition of Cuban Jews? How free are the Jews to practice their religion and to what extent does the government control their communal life? Is being a Jew an obstacle to complete assimilation into Cuban society? What are the community's needs, and to what extent are they supplied by the existing institutions? What traces from pre-revolutionary times can be seen in today's Jewish community? In order to answer these and other questions, we will begin with an historical survey of the Cuban arena and of the components of its Jewish community.

The Roots of Cuba's Traditional Attitude towards the Jews

Cuba lived under Spanish rule for almost 400 years. Spain's policy had been to maintain religious purity and unity, and it did not tolerate, at least officially, the immigration of non-Catholics, apart from that of African slaves who were forced to convert.³ New Christians who had settled in Cuba during colonial times had to hide their Jewish origin, and there were several cases of crypto-Jews who were judged by the Inquisition, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ With time, however, they assimilated into the Catholic society, though some Cuban families preserved the memory of their Jewish ancestry.

Religious antisemitism, as was transmitted by Catholic priests or by the government's policy, was less powerful in Cuba than it had been in Spain or in other Spanish possessions (most of which had gained their political freedom 80 years earlier than Cuba). Religious devotion in Cuba characterized mainly the representatives of Spanish rule and the immigrants from Spain. Creole society, apart from the higher strata who identified with Spanish values, showed little interest in religious matters, and developed an attitude that was a combination of indifference and tolerance. The large black population, composed originally of African slaves, was more devoted to its African heritage than to Catholic doctrines.⁵

The absence of both Jewish presence and religious fanaticism

contributed to the disconnection of the chain of antisemitism that continued to exist in Europe, transformed by political and social circumstances into new forms. In Cuba the Jewish problem had disappeared, and the image of the Jew as the crucifier of Christ was converted into a diabolic mythical creature. When Jewish immigration into Cuba actually began, Creole society refused to identify the newcomers as *judíos* (Jews), since they had no horns nor tail.⁶ In popular use the word "*judío*" referred to a child before he had been baptized.⁷

The legal basis for the entry of Jews into Cuba was formed during the military occupation by the United States (1898-1902), when the principles of religious freedom and separation between church and state were operative also in Cuba. These principles, however, were totally in accordance with the opinions of the founders of the Cuban republic, many of whom had been Freemasons and critics of the Catholic Church that had opposed Cuban independence. Unlike other countries in Latin America, where separation between church and state was reached after protracted conflict between liberals and conservatives, religion had never been an issue among the advocates of Cuban freedom, whose people they considered "the least believing [Catholic people] in the whole globe."⁸

Thus the entry of Jewish immigrants into Cuba did not arouse any dormant prejudices, but was rather accepted as that of any other European group, according to the personal impressions they had made on the Cuban people and to the economic and political circumstances at the time of immigration. Jews were nicknamed after their major countries of origin: *Turcos* (Turks) or *Polacos* (Poles). The image of the poor *Polaco* peddler selling ties became part of Cuban folklore. The Jewish *Turcos* were not considered a distinct group, but were rather identified with other immigrants from the Middle East, mainly Syrians and Lebanese, or with their Ashkenazi co-religionists.

Jews never lost their stigma as *Polacos*, not even in today's Cuba where third-generation Jews, many of them children of mixed marriages, are sometimes still nicknamed *Polaco* or the diminutive *Polaquito*. Like the *Gallegos* (Spaniards) and the *Chinos* (the Chinese), the *Polacos* have been recognized as one of the minority groups within Cuban society.⁹

Like other minority groups, Jews were discriminated against by law and by social attitudes following the rise of Cuban nationalism in the early 1930s. Xenophobia was temporarily converted into sporadic expressions of antisemitism as a consequence of instigations by agents of Nazi Germany. A study on Cuban antisemitism during the period of the Holocaust concluded that antisemitism was transmitted to Cuba from Europe and found fertile ground among the Spanish minority group, but it did not strike roots in the Cuban majority society.¹⁰

Though largely dominated by the United States, Cuba had its

spiritual roots in Spain and the Spanish Civil War was politically echoed in Cuba. The struggle against Spanish Fascism, identified as the successor to their colonial oppressor, found great support among the Cuban people as well as among its leadership; it rested primarily in the Communist Party, legalized and later accepted into Fulgencio Batista's first government (1940-44).¹¹

Since the days of the Popular Front, Cuban communists were among the defenders of the Jewish community against antisemitic attacks both locally and internationally. Friendship between Jewish and Cuban communists consolidated during their collaboration on behalf of the Allied cause, and in particular for the Red Army. The communists' attitude of sympathy and solidarity towards the Jews, disseminated during their mutual struggle against Fascism and Nazism, was destined to bear fruit both before and after the Castro Revolution, and should not be overlooked while examining the attitude of the revolutionary government towards the Jewish community.

While official antisemitism has never existed in Cuba, Cuban authorities have demonstrated on several occasions a sympathetic attitude towards the Jewish people. It seems, however, that Cuba is recorded in Jewish history mainly through two events — the St. Louis tragedy and its "no" vote on the partition of Palestine. Each of these episodes, disconnected from its historical context, tends to distort both Cuba's overall balance in the rescue of Jewish refugees during the Holocaust,¹² and the wide support in all its political parties for the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel.¹³

The sympathetic attitude towards the Jewish people, especially among liberal and left-wing intellectuals and politicians, found its expression in the friendly relations that had developed between Cuba and the State of Israel during the democratic presidency of Carlos Prío Socarras (1948-52) and during the military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1952-58).¹⁴ It should be stressed that the great economic progress made by local Jews throughout the above period, accompanied by expressions of *nouvelle richesse*, was accepted with great tolerance by the Cuban society. This does not imply that social prejudices towards Jews were non-existent, but they were mostly limited to the higher social strata who were reluctant to accept Jews to prestigious clubs or social circles. Among the low bourgeoisie and poorer classes, who were destined to carry on their shoulders the burden of the Castro Revolution, antisemitism was a rare phenomenon.¹⁵

The History of the Jewish Immigrants and their Institutions

The American Group

Jewish immigration into Cuba began with a small group of U.S. citizens who settled in Cuba after the Spanish-American War (1898) and during the first years of Cuban independence. This first nucleus of "American" Jews in Cuba was composed mainly of Romanian-born Jews who had lived in southern Florida where the Cuban movement for independence was widely supported. Having been naturalized in the U.S. they saw themselves as Americans, conducted their social life in English and identified with the local American colony. Their first preoccupation as Jews concerned the dead: in 1906 a group of eleven Jews formed a society that would provide burial grounds for future Jewish settlers in Cuba. Under the name of the United Hebrew Congregation they purchased a large tract of land in the nearby town of Guanabacoa, where the Jewish cemetery was inaugurated in 1910.¹⁶

In the first period of its existence, the activities of the United Hebrew Congregation were limited to religious services during the High Holy Days, held in one of Havana's hotels. Confronted with poor Sephardic immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, the American Jews were compelled to grant them burial space, but refused to accept the Sephardim into their congregation.¹⁷

The arrival of U.S.-born Jewish businessmen and representatives of American firms in Cuba following the expansion of the sugar industry led to the organization of regular religious services within the framework of a Reform Temple called Beth Israel.

In 1921, after the first U.S. Quota Act, hundreds of destitute immigrants from Eastern Europe appeared on the streets of Havana, and their number grew constantly. The small American group, estimated at around 100 persons, came to their rescue with great personal devotion and practically saved them from starvation.¹⁸ Their philanthropic methods, however, were highly criticized by U.S. welfare organizations that began to function in Cuba to work directly with the Eastern European immigrants. Thus the Americans were replaced as the leadership of the Jewish community.

A similar story occurred fifteen years later when imported Nazi antisemitism threatened the security of the local Jews and strengthened a restrictive immigration policy. Refugees from Germany and Austria who had found temporary shelter in Cuba found a mutual language with the upper middle class American Jews who represented both their affluent past and their aspiration to reach the United States. Individual American Jews used their contacts in government

circles in defense of the whole community, but were unable to attain the confidence of the dominant group of Eastern European Jews. At the same time they failed to collaborate with the Joint Distribution Committee, which had taken the responsibility for the Jewish refugees, and, as in the early 1920s, their philanthropy was limited to the activities of their women's charity.

With the decline of its philanthropic requirements, the United Hebrew Congregation remained a small upper class group, living socially apart from the rest of the Jewish population. Although it dominated one of the basic Jewish necessities — the cemetery, the American group did not lead the Jewish community at large.

The Sephardi Community

Another Jewish group that arrived in Cuba was composed of Sephardi Jews, mostly from the European parts of Turkey. Their immigration began with young men, seeking their fortune or fleeing military service, who had arrived in Cuba prior to World War I, who would be joined by their families soon after the war. In 1926 their number was estimated at around 4,000: 1,500 in Havana and the rest in the countryside.¹⁹ Like other immigrants from the Middle East, mostly Syrian and Lebanese Christians, Sephardi Jews dispersed throughout the island, making their living as peddlers or petty merchants. Speaking Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), they had no difficulty in assimilating into the language of the country.

The first organization of Cuban Sephardi Jews, the Union Hebrea Chevet Ahim, was founded in 1914 in order to supply all the religious and social needs of the Sephardic immigrants. These included daily religious services, kosher meat and charity. Burial grounds were granted by the American Jews. Tourists in today's Havana can visit the original building of Chevet Ahim, dating from the early 1920s, located on Inquisidor Street, in the quarter of Old Havana where new immigrants used to settle.

The second center of Sephardi social life in Havana, the club of the Union Hebrea Chevet Ahim on the Avenida del Prado, has totally disappeared. The club, which had served as a second synagogue, used to hold social and cultural activities and, from the 1930s to the Revolution, was considered by Sephardi parents as the best place for their children to find a Jewish spouse.

Chevet Ahim was considered the mother-community of Sephardi organizations in the interior, most of which were founded in the 1920s, and it maintained contact with them through the yearly supply of matzot or joint fundraising campaigns. The two major communities outside Havana were in Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba; both had a

rabbi, a synagogue, and occasionally a supplementary Hebrew school. While in Havana Sephardi Jews used the cemetery of the United Hebrew Congregation (until they inaugurated their own cemetery in 1942), Sephardi Jews built their own cemeteries in the different provincial towns, and they granted burial facilities to their Ashkenazi brethren.²⁰

Two important factors determined the development of the Sephardic community of Cuba: the homogenous composition of its members and the presence of spiritual-religious leadership.²¹ The most important religious leader, Rabbi Gershon Maya, was a descendant of an old rabbinical family from Silivri, the community of origin of many of Havana's Sephardim. Rabbi Maya's devotion to Jewish education as well as to the Zionist movement found expression in the Teodoro Herzl day school that served both the Sephardi community and the Zionist Organization.

Sephardi Jews were among the founders of the Union Sionista — Cuba's Zionist Organization, and for several years they continued to collaborate with Ashkenazi Jews on behalf of the Zionist cause, although they were gradually pushed away by the Yiddish speaking majority. This coincided with a growing economic gap between the two sectors: while Ashkenazi peddlers or workers were turning into merchants and industrialists and moving into better areas of residence, many Sephardim continued to peddle on Havana's streets.

The Eastern European Community

Immigrants from Eastern Europe — Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Romania and Hungary — were the largest Jewish group that entered Cuba. Their immigration began in 1921, as a consequence of the first U.S. Quota Law, and reached a considerable size after the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. The number of those who settled in Cuba was estimated at around 8,000, but several thousand others passed through Cuba on route to the U.S.²²

The restrictive U.S. immigration policy coincided with a period of economic crisis in Cuba. Immigrants from Eastern Europe encountered great difficulties due to the general misery and unemployment, the unfamiliar surroundings and the difficult climate, and their greatest desire was to proceed northward to the U.S. Until around 1930, the Cuban Ashkenazi population was characterized by an unstable existence caused by the strong waves of immigration from Europe and emigration to the U.S., but with the ultimate closing of both Cuba and the U.S. to immigration, Jews began to strike roots in their new land.

Eastern European Jews tended to concentrate in Havana. Some made their living as peddlers of petty merchandise, others began to

manufacture shoes, shirts, ties or underwear. Since clothing and leather goods were mostly imported and very expensive, the cheap products introduced by the Jews were in high demand, and the poor tailors and shoemakers were soon able to hire newer immigrants for their sweatshops.²³

The institutional life of the Eastern European Jews began in 1925 with a schism between the workers and the "bourgeoisie" — small merchants or owners of sweatshops whose economic situation was not much better than that of their workers. The former created the Kultur Farain (Cultural Society), while the latter founded the Centro Israelita de Cuba (Jewish Center of Cuba), both catering to the social and spiritual needs of the Jewish immigrants.

The Kultur Farain was considered the most active center of Jewish cultural and social life in the late 1920s. It had a large collection of books and periodicals, a choir, a dramatic circle, and provided evening classes for its members. Its leaders had close links with the Cuban Communist Party, founded in 1925, and they joined the political struggle against the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado (1925-1933), five of them paying with their lives and several others being expelled from Cuba.²⁴

Jewish presence in the early stages of Cuba's Communist Party aroused the interest of historians following the communist turn in Fidel Castro's Revolution. According to the minutes of the founding session of the Cuban Communist Party three out of the ten founders were Jews;²⁵ one of them, Yunger Simchowitch, was destined to play a central role in the history of Cuban communism under the name of Fabio Grobart. Today, at the age of 85 and still an active member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, Grobart denies his past links with the Jewish community, but witnesses remember him as the most active propagandist among the Jewish workers.²⁶

While the Kultur Farain functioned as an active social center until it was closed in 1931 by the Cuban government, the Centro Israelita became the leading institution of Cuban Jewry as a result of its relations with Jewish welfare organizations in the U.S. Social aid from U.S. Jewry was essential to save the immigrants from misery and to serve their immediate needs, but it was also intended to convince them to remain in Cuba and give up their American dream.

Representatives of the American Jewish welfare institutions functioning in Cuba directed all their financial support to the Centro Israelita, hoping to transform it into a comprehensive communal organization that would provide all the social services for the Jewish population. Thus they accelerated the development of local institutional life, but they also weakened the independence of the local leadership and, in the long run, the Centro Israelita could not break free of its dependence on U.S. Jewry.

During more than 25 years, the Centro Israelita was recognized by the Cuban authorities as the representative organ of the Jewish community, and though often its leadership was challenged by other organizations, none of them was able to replace it. At the same time, the Centro Israelita was the central arena for political conflicts inside the community; its most important function, however, was the maintenance of the largest Jewish day school.

Besides the above-mentioned institutions, Eastern European Jews created a large network of organizations covering every aspect of their social life.²⁷ Two that continued to have an impact on Jewish life after the revolution were Adath Israel and the Union Sionista.

Ashkenazi immigrants to Cuba were not characterized by strict observance of Jewish law. A small group of Orthodox Jews who assumed responsibility for the religious needs of the whole community founded Adath Israel in 1925, the most important religious organization of Ashkenazi Jews. Due to an old dispute between religious activists, a group of Orthodox Jews headed by Rabbi Zvi Kaplan founded a second congregation — Knesseth Israel. Each maintained a synagogue in the same building, on Jesus Maria Street, close to Havana's harbor. Both provided religious weddings and circumcisions, and supervised kosher slaughtering. In addition, Adath Israel founded a Chevra Kadisha that took care of the religious aspects of burial, though the cemetery remained the property of the American Jews.

The Zionist Organization of Cuba was founded in 1924. Being a minority among Eastern European Jews, the organization was highly dependent upon the Chevet Ahim congregation, and in its early stages Sephardic Jews were among its most active members. Its founders decided to avoid political divisions by creating one Zionist Union — the Union Sionista de Cuba. This unity was maintained in future years: the Union Sionista served as the roof organization of all the Zionist movements — Hechalutz, Hashomer Hatzair, Maccabi and, in later years, Betar and Hanoar Hazioni.²⁸

Conflicts between the Zionists and the communists in Cuba reflect similar conflicts throughout the Jewish world. While the majority of Ashkenazi Jews belonged to the working class, the Kultur Farain enjoyed its heyday on the Jewish street. The influence of Cuban nationalism on the Cuban labor movement and the decrease in the number of Jewish workers considerably diminished the number of Jewish advocates of communism, leaving a small, though militant, group. With the legalization of the Cuban Communist Party (1938), Jewish communists became very active, and in spite of bitter disputes with the Zionists during the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, they regained their popularity after Hitler's invasion of Russia when their activities on behalf of the Red Army were aligned with Jewish interests.

Zionism, however, was slowly growing among the masses of Cuban

Jews who were deeply shaken by the horrors of the Holocaust, in which many Cuban Ashkenazi Jews had lost relatives. Witnesses interviewed for an historical study of Cuban Jewry testified about their ideological transformation from indifference or opposition to emphatic support for the Zionist movement.²⁹ This tendency was highly accelerated after the establishment of the State of Israel.

World War II Refugees

During the period of the Holocaust, Cuba provided temporary shelter for almost 12,000 refugees.³⁰ Half of these refugees, mostly from Germany and Austria, entered Cuba between June 1938 and May 1939, using loopholes in Cuban immigration laws and semi-official arrangements based on graft.³¹ Although granted temporary residence that for many meant rescue from the concentration camps, the refugees were in constant danger of deportation. Since Cuban law deprived them of the right to engage in gainful occupations, many of them were totally dependent on their relatives' support or on the aid of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).³²

The famous incident of the ship *St. Louis*, when more than 1,000 Jewish refugees were refused entry into Havana and were compelled to return to Europe, resulted in the locking of Cuba's gates.³³ These, however, were reopened in October 1940, and remained open until April 1942, thus facilitating the rescue of over 5,000 Jews from various countries in Central and Western Europe. Their entry was conditioned by the payment of large sums of money to Cuban officials, so that this outlet was available only to the wealthy.³⁴

The most dominant group among those who arrived in Cuba between 1940 and 1942 were from Belgium. Unlike the refugees from Germany and Austria, socially disconnected from the local *Ostjuden*, many of the Belgian Jews were originally from Poland and they participated in the local organizations, giving a special impulse to the development of the Zionist movement. Their strongest impact was the establishment of the diamond industry, encouraged by Cuba's government, that provided a profitable source of income for both refugees and veteran Jews.³⁵

After World War II, previous diamond centers were rehabilitated, and the small Belgian colony in Cuba either returned to Antwerp or emigrated to New York. Other Jewish refugees were gradually able to enter the U.S. through the quotas of their countries of origin, especially when emigration from Europe came almost to a stop during the war. The large colony of Jewish refugees eventually disappeared without a trace, its only imprint being a few graves in the Guanabacoa cemetery carrying German inscriptions.

The Jewish Community Under Batista's Military Dictatorship

Though marked by violent political repression, the military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1958) brought prosperity to the economic sectors into which the Jews had been integrated. Sephardi Jews, formerly dispersed throughout the island, centered in the main cities, especially in Havana. In the capital, the once poor immigrants of Old Havana moved into better residential areas such as Santos Suarez, Vedado, or the elegant Miramar. While the majority were engaged in commerce and industry, many among the second generation, Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike, acquired higher education and turned to the liberal professions.³⁶

Jews did not interfere in political matters, since the process of their assimilation within Cuban society was only at its beginning. A group of young intellectuals founded the Agrupacion Cultural Hebreo-Cubana in order to encourage understanding between Jews and Cubans. Among Jewish university students, however, only a small minority were engaged in the revolutionary underground movement.³⁷ Jewish communists had been active in Cuban politics, but during this period they almost totally disappeared from the Jewish arena, following the repression of the Communist Party and disappointment with the Soviet Union's policy toward Israel and the Jews.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Jewish community experienced a Zionist revival. Activities on behalf of the Jewish state were the axis of Jewish communal life, and their economic prosperity expressed itself in generous contributions to the Israel Bond drive and other Zionist campaigns. Diplomatic relations between Cuba and Israel, established in 1954, strengthened the self-confidence of the local Jews. Friendship between the two countries was reflected in the planting of the Jose Marti Forest in the Judean hills and the naming of a Havana school "Estado de Israel."³⁸ Sender Kaplan, the president of the Union Sionista, functioned as Honorary Consul of Israel (1951-1960); thus he was recognized as both the diplomatic representative of the State of Israel and the main leader of the Jewish community.

An important consequence of both economic prosperity and self-confidence was a movement of exhibitionist construction of new buildings for the Jewish institutions. The most salient among them was the Patronato — Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba (House of the Jewish Community of Cuba), situated on 13th and I Streets in Vedado. The Patronato was initiated by a group of rich Jews, and designed by the famous Cuban architect Aquiles Capablanca. It was inaugurated in October 1955 in the presence of President Batista, Prime Minister Jorge Garcia Montes, and other high officials.³⁹

The Patronato was designed to replace the Centro Israelita de Cuba

as the representative organ of the Jewish community, and its building reflected the transformation of Cuban Jews from their position as a group of immigrants, struggling for survival in a foreign land, to that of an established colony, well-rooted in the general middle class. The large building of the Patronato was divided between a beautiful modern synagogue and a social and cultural center, whose main hall had a capacity of 1,250 seats.⁴⁰ The magnificent building, noticeable from afar by its high arch and decorated with Jewish emblems, symbolized the self-deceptive tranquillity and confidence of the Jewish community in its future.

Members of the Orthodox group, gathered around Adath Israel, preferred to erect their own building in Old Havana, where many of them still lived.⁴¹ On the corner of Picota and Acosta Streets they constructed a three-story building containing a large synagogue (600 seats), a reception hall, a small synagogue for the daily *minyan*, and a *mikve*.

The building of the Patronato and the new Adath Israel served as models to the Sephardi sector. Upper class Sephardim living in Vedado and Miramar wished to establish a new organization that would fit their new social position. They founded a new congregation, Centro Hebreo Sefaradi, that constructed a beautiful synagogue and social center on 17th and E Streets in Vedado. The building of the Centro Sefaradi was accompanied by conflicts with the Sephardim of Old Havana who were faithful to the primacy of Chevet Ahim. However, the Castro Revolution occurred before the Sephardim had time to properly inaugurate their new center and to redefine the relationship between the new Centro Sefaradi and the old Chevet Ahim.

The first Jewish organization in Cuba, the United Hebrew Congregation, was the last to be caught by the construction fever. In 1956, after the celebration of the congregation's fiftieth anniversary, American Jews were about to purchase a piece of land on Miramar's Fifth Avenue and 32nd Street. Their project never materialized, however. When the Revolution occurred, American Jews were among the first to leave Cuba and return to the U.S., which they considered as their homeland.

The Attitude of the Revolutionary Government toward the Jews

The Cuban Revolution, which took power on 1 January 1959, brought about the total destruction of the former economic, political and social structure in which the Jewish community had prospered. Nationalization of private business, economic privations, and Fidel Castro's open identification with Marxist-Leninist ideology were among the causes of the large-scale emigration of upper and middle class Cubans

including the majority of Cuban Jews, whose number declined from 10,000-12,000 in 1959 to 1,200 in 1963.⁴²

A large number of Cuban Jews had emigrated to the U.S.; like other Cuban emigrants, they were treated by the new government as enemies of the revolution, their property was confiscated and they were allowed to take along only a minimal number of personal belongings. Jews leaving for Israel were aided by the Jewish Agency and the Israeli Legation, and were granted the respect and sympathy of the Cuban authorities, though only a small number chose the Zionist solution.⁴³ The majority, including the Zionist leaders of the community, settled in Miami.

The Jews remaining in Cuba were allowed to maintain all their former institutions. These included five congregations: the United Hebrew Congregation of the American Jews, the Patronato and Adath Israel of the Ashkenazi sector, and the Centro Sefaradi and Chevet Ahim of the Sephardim. The government did not attempt to confiscate these buildings, although the number of their members had severely declined. Moises Baldas, who served as the leading Jewish activist after the Revolution (until his emigration to Israel in 1981), organized an informal committee composed of the presidents of the five congregations in order to coordinate their activities and represent the Jewish community before the authorities. The Comision Coordinadora (Coordinating Committee) became the de facto roof organization of Cuban Jewry.⁴⁴

Following the Revolution, the Jewish community was granted special privileges to supply its religious needs, such as kosher food and Jewish education. The *shochet* of Adath Israel was allowed to function in the government slaughtering house, and the meat was divided between the kosher restaurant of the Patronato and Jewish customers who were allowed to receive their meat rations at the kosher butcher. In addition, the community was allowed to receive matzot and other products for Pessach from abroad.

The nationalization of education brought about the closure of all private schools. Jews, however, were granted special permission to provide Jewish education within the government system. The school of the Centro Israelita was named after Albert Einstein and converted to a regular neighborhood school. In addition, it provided daily classes in Hebrew, Yiddish and Jewish history, and the government supplied transportation for the Jewish children.⁴⁵ This arrangement functioned until 1975, when it was suddenly stopped by government order.⁴⁶

It should be recalled that the regulations under which the Jewish community functioned were formed during the first period of the Revolution, while Cuba maintained friendly relations with the State of Israel, and the Jewish community felt somewhat protected by the Israeli

Legation. Fidel Castro's initial sympathy towards Israel and the Jewish people has been explained by some scholars as stemming from his political background — consolidated in an anti-Nazi and anti-Franco atmosphere, in his close personal links with Ricardo Subirana y Lobo — Cuba's Ambassador to Israel, in the image of Israel as a small country surrounded by enemies and guided by a socialist leadership, as well as in Castro's desire to maintain political independence vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.⁴⁷

Cuba's resistance to strong political pressures to terminate diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six-Day War changed with Castro's sudden announcement breaking relations with Israel at the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Algiers in September 1973. Since then Cuba has become one of the most vociferous attackers of Israel both in its local media and in the international arena. In 1975 it was one of the sponsors of the U.N. General Assembly's resolution equating Zionism with racism.⁴⁸ An important consequence of Cuba's international position towards Zionism was the closure in 1978 of the Union Sionista de Cuba, which had continued to function in Havana. The building was given to the PLO and converted into the Union Arabe de Cuba.

Officially Cuba maintains a clear distinction between Zionism and Judaism; while the former is attacked daily in the mass media, anti-semitism is strictly forbidden by law.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, some publications carry a clear tinge of antisemitism, stemming from Soviet or Arab sources. Attacks against Israel were particularly strong during the government of Menachem Begin, depicted in Cuban cartoons as "a dog wearing a collar with a swastika."⁵⁰ Other examples may be found in books such as that of Abu Mazzen, *The Truth on Secret Relations Between Nazism and Zionism*.⁵¹ In his study on "Cuban Jews during 30 Years of Revolution," Moises Asis qualifies the antisemitic deviations as exceptions to the Cuban rule "not to confuse information or propaganda against Israel with negative hints against the Jewish People, its religion, culture or history."⁵²

Asis' view should not be taken as lip service to the authorities; neither the Jewish community nor individual Jews had been victims of discrimination. David Kopilow wrote that "It is difficult to avoid drawing the conclusion that the official anti-Zionist stand of the government on international questions has translated into a callousness and hostility towards the Cuban-Jewish community that can be called anti-Semitic,"⁵³ but he does not offer evidence to substantiate his conclusion.

This author is convinced that neither official nor social anti-semitism exists in Cuba, and that the government makes a clear distinction between its policy towards Israel, based on political considerations, and its attitude towards the Jewish community. The latter is a combination of several factors: ideological principles

opposing any discrimination against minorities; sensitivity towards international public opinion, that examines the Jewish community as a test case of religious freedom; traditional sympathy towards the Jewish community; and the continuation of previous bureaucratic arrangements, established in the early 1960s.⁵⁴

It should be added that the special attitude of Cuba's communist government towards the Jewish community, as well as towards other religious groups, cannot be explained without taking into account the personality of Dr. Jose Felipe de Carneado, head of the Oficina de Asuntos Religiosos (Office of Religious Matters) in the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Born in a provincial town, well-rooted in Cuban tradition, Carneado was politically educated among the old-time communists. He became an ardent supporter of the Revolution, but maintained a deep respect for popular Cuban tradition and beliefs. For almost 30 years he has been responsible for all religious matters in Cuba. One of his greatest achievements was to create a clear distinction between religion and politics, especially in the case of the Catholic Church, where struggles against anti-revolutionary forces were intermingled with suppression of religion. Carneado's tolerance and openness resulted in the special *modus vivendi* existent in Cuba, where religious groups that accept the government's rules not to identify with Cuba's opponents are granted not only official tolerance, but are practically protected by the Office of Religious Matters in the provision of all their needs.⁵⁵ The Jewish community is only one such example.

The Present Situation⁵⁶

The number of Cuban Jews today is estimated around 1,000. The only available data is the annual Passover census, carried out by the Coordinating Committee. According to Asis' calculations, based on the 1989 census, 892 persons subscribed in the Jewish community for matzot and other kosher products. Of these, 635 were Jews and the rest were non-Jewish spouses or other persons living in the same household.⁵⁷ The large number of non-Jews is explained by the fact that scarcity of food makes it impossible to discriminate between Jews and non-Jews while distributing foodstuffs to people living under the same roof. On the other hand it is assumed that a large number of Jews refrain from subscription in the Jewish community because of their communist convictions, or their fear to identify openly with the Jewish community.

Cuban Jews do not constitute a separate socio-economic group, and they are well-assimilated within the general society. Twenty percent of the persons counted in the community's census worked in the professions, and their number among those not identified with the community

is assumed to be higher.⁵⁸ A small number of Jews, mostly Sephardim, live in the interior towns, but the majority is centered in the capital. Apart from a relatively large number of old people still living in Old Havana, Jews are dispersed throughout the city, whereas prior to the Revolution they tended to concentrate in distinct areas. One of the problems facing the community is to provide transportation for the Jewish school or other activities because of the large geographic distances.

Four out of the five religious congregations are still functioning in Havana. The Reform temple of the American Jews, on Avenida de los Presidentes (in Vedado), continued to function until around 1980 when it was sold to the government for lack of members; the building is now undergoing reconstruction by the Cuban state.

The property of the United Hebrew Congregation was passed on to Adath Israel, but the organization has not been formally dissolved; it has a Board of Directors that meets regularly, to fulfill official obligations. Since the nationalization of the cemeteries in 1967, the state has assumed responsibility for burial expenses, but the United Hebrew Congregation continues to be recognized as the manager and proprietor of the cemetery that had been once the cornerstone of Jewish institutional existence in Cuba.

Chevet Ahim is the only Jewish organization still functioning in its original premises, and it remained throughout the years as the center of the Sephardim living in Old Havana, many of whom continued to work as peddlers until private commerce was prohibited. While many of the Jews who remained in Cuba after the Revolution received compensation for their nationalized property or found employment in government-owned establishments, the poor Sephardi peddlers, who did not profit from the economic opportunities under Batista, lacked initiative to leave Cuba and were unable to adjust to the revolutionary regime. Some of them remained with no source of income and have since been living on the small subvention distributed by the local Jewish institutions.

Chevet Ahim continued to serve as a social and religious center as long as it had an active leadership. Since its guiding spirit, Jacobo Perez, was taken ill, the situation of the Sephardi organization has been constantly deteriorating, and since the death of the *haham* Susi in 1986, there is no one capable of conducting religious services.

For several years the government permitted the functioning of a bar, and revenues from the sale of beer financed the social activities of Chevet Ahim. Now the old Sephardi organization is totally dependent on the income of the Centro Sefaradi; both have the same board of directors, headed by Roberto Levi, and the same membership. Friday evening services are held at Chevet Ahim and Sabbath morning prayers at the Centro Sefaradi. During this author's stay in Havana,

services were conducted by an old man who could barely read Hebrew or by a young Cuban who had adopted Judaism and studied at the small Jewish school at the Patronato (see below). The depressing impression made by the former and the surprising knowledge of the latter prove the urgent necessity of basic religious instruction in order to avoid the closure of these synagogues.

While its inner forces are gradually dying out, Chevet Ahim has received unexpected encouragement from the fact that it is located in an area to be preserved for its historical importance. Old Havana was recognized by UNESCO in 1982 as part of the World's Heritage, and the quarter is undergoing reconstruction under the surveillance of Eusebio Leal, the City Historian. The old Sephardi synagogue, decorated in the early 1920s, is now being repaired by the Cuban socialist state. Members of the Board of Directors of Chevet Ahim claim that their building, rich with memories and of historical value, deserves to be turned into a Jewish museum, but it seems that without help from outside sources they are bound to leave the naked walls as the sole witnesses to their past.

The decline of the Sephardi community is even more remarkable at the Centro Sefaradi. The beautiful building, including the spacious synagogue, has been hired out to the government-owned symphony orchestra, and thus has been converted into the only source of income of the Sephardic community. Participants in the Sabbath service enter the building through the side entrance leading into a small synagogue and an office; a table placed in the middle of the corridor serves as the meeting place after services, where breakfast is served. Here, as in the other institutions, refreshments are an essential means to attract participants.

Compared to the Sephardim, the Ashkenazi sector seems much better organized and provides a wider range of functions; it has a stronger leadership and a broader membership, including some Sephardim. It is divided between two centers: Adath Israel of Old Havana and the Patronato in Vedado. Both have rented out or sold part of their original buildings as a source of income (the former to the radio and TV orchestra and the latter to a theater company), but they have preserved a much larger part for their current activities.

Adath Israel, which continues to function as the most important religious center, was guaranteed by the rental agreement that the orchestra would respect the sanctity of the synagogue and refrain from rehearsing during Jewish festivities. More than two-thirds of the building is used by the Jewish organization, in particular the ground floor where the daily activities are centered. The large hall is divided into compartments by low partitions, thus creating a sense of unity between the synagogue, the offices, the dining hall, and the recreation area. A daily *minyan*, mostly of old people, is held

regularly twice a day. The modest breakfast served after the morning prayer is an important part of the participants' daily nourishment. A chat around the dining table, followed by a game of dominos, converts the daily prayer into a center of social activity, a poor version of a golden age club.

Adath Israel is responsible for kosher slaughtering, authorized by the Cuban government and carried out in the municipal slaughterhouse. Since meat and fowl are strictly rationed, Jews are entitled to buy their meat quota in the community's Carniceria (butcher shop), which opens three consecutive Mondays each month; 431 persons are subscribed as its regular clients.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, Adath Israel lacks spiritual leadership and cannot supply some of the most basic religious services. Without a resident rabbi in Cuba there are no Jewish weddings or conversions; bar mitzvah ceremonies have totally disappeared, and there has been no *mohel* to circumcize newborns for over ten years.

Adath Israel, serving also as Chevra Kadisha, devotes much effort to provide Jewish burial for Ashkenazi Jews. Since many of the Jews left in Cuba are intermarried, the families are not always cooperative in fulfilling the deceased's wish to be buried according to ancestral tradition, and they sometimes have to cope with delicate situations. Abraham Berezniak, managing director of Adath Israel, who acts also as ritual slaughterer, confessed that it is a particularly difficult task to wash and dress the dead, but, like his colleagues in the Sephardi community, the few remaining activists must fulfill this sacred obligation.⁶⁰

While Adath Israel focuses on supplying basic religious necessities, the Patronato stresses cultural activities and the representation of the community to the outside world. The Patronato has preserved its former synagogue, famous for its rich metal door covered with Jewish insignia. While the outside aspect of the building has been well-preserved, the hall of the once-magnificent synagogue presents a sad sight to Jewish tourists visiting Havana; the ceiling is broken, the once beautiful *parochet* — covering an empty ark — is torn, and the Seat of Eliahu is covered with dove-droppings. This, however, is only a partial view: the next room houses a small synagogue, well-preserved, with regular Sabbath services conducted in accordance with the Ashkenazi rite by people who still remember the tradition.

On the ground floor, the part of the building still in possession of the Jewish community consists of a small office, a large hall with an adjoining kitchen, and a library. In the 1960s and 1970s the community had its own restaurant which served kosher food; now the place is used to prepare lunch for participants in the Sabbath services and as the central gathering place during Jewish festivals. Here the Patronato

holds a community Seder and parties on Hannukah and Purim, open to the entire Jewish public.

The library, directed by Adela Dworin, houses a large collection of books in different languages, and is the only place where one can find a Jewish printed word. Unfortunately, during the last thirty years only sporadic periodicals and books have found their way into that collection. Cuban intellectuals interested in information about Israel or the Jewish people, or young Cuban Jews curious to learn about their ancestral tradition, find a meager selection. The rich collection of Yiddish classics — once the best sellers on the Jewish street — accumulate dust on the shelves.

The Patronato houses the community's Sunday School where a small group of children learns Hebrew, the meaning of Jewish festivals, and some Jewish history. The school was first organized by Moises Baldas, then head of the Coordinating Committee, to substitute for the Albert Einstein school after it was closed in 1975. The decline in the number of children and the death or emigration of the teachers had brought about its closure, and in the early 1980s there was no formal Jewish education in Cuba. Following a visit by members of the Habad movement, the Sunday School was reorganized in 1985 by Moises Asis. Aided by another volunteer teacher, Dr. Mechulam, Asis has to cope with many difficulties: to locate Jewish children, to convince their parents to send them to the little school, and to draw their attention to a language and tradition that is completely foreign to their daily experience.

Almost all the students in the Sunday School, like the rest of the younger generation of the Jewish community, are children of mixed marriages; in fact, it is hard to define "who is a Jew" in Cuba. An unknown number of those who had been born to Jewish families have chosen the path of militant communism, and keep aloof from everything connected with Judaism. On the other hand, Cuban women, married to Jewish men, often defend the traditional inheritance of their husbands more zealously than Jewish-born mothers. Many of those identifying themselves as Jews might not understand their denial by *halakhic* conceptions; they possess a strong sense of belonging to Judaism but very vague knowledge.

Jewish youth do not possess a formal organization, but both the Patronato and Adath Israel serve as gathering places for young people yearning to learn something about their tradition. Having been educated in atheist Cuba, most of these youngsters have little interest in religion and little mutual understanding with the elderly Jews who participate in synagogue services. They rather wish to understand the meaning of their Jewish identity, and lack, more than anything else, adequate spiritual guidance.

As mentioned above, the existence of Jewish congregations is facilitated by the government, which pays the rent for their buildings and supervises their legal functioning. None of the Jewish organizations have altered their by-laws since the Revolution, and they are careful to fulfill the formal requirements, including regular elections, payment of membership fees, and preservation of records of meetings.⁶¹ To the outside visitor it may seem that the division among four synagogues weakens the small existing community, but agitation of this fragile structure might prove fatal. In addition, local Jews consider the preservation of their institutions as an existential problem, and the struggle to maintain all four organizations is a barrier against indifference.

Leaders of the community are aware of the dangers of inner division and coordinate their activities to avoid further weakening of their forces. The Coordinating Committee, composed of the presidents and secretaries of the five communal organizations, is essential both to have a single voice vis-a-vis the government and for internal purposes.

One of the major functions of the Coordinating Committee is the division and sale of products for Passover, received annually from the Canadian Jewish Congress. The role that these products fulfill in the lives of Cuban Jews is incredibly important, since they often represent the only link with Judaism, especially for people living in the interior towns where no form of Jewish organization exists. There is no denying that several people buy Passover products in order to supplement their poor diet, especially during periods of economic difficulty. The ability of the Jewish organizations to sweeten the Jewish holidays with a richer meal becomes their source of attraction; for children of assimilated families, the eating of a traditional dish becomes an expression of identification with Jewishness.

Passover products are distributed free to people who cannot afford to pay for them; others are charged a symbolic price which serves as a source of revenue to enable the Coordinating Committee to provide a monthly stipend for those in need. Many of the worshipers at Adath Israel are totally dependent on these stipends which are their only source of income. The Canadian Jewish Congress has been the only pipeline which has provided continuous assistance to a community which had felt, for many years, disconnected and forgotten by the Jewish world.

The general problems of the community were dealt with for over twenty years by Moises Baldas, a devoted activist who struggled to maintain Jewish continuity, in particular through education and cultural activities. Since his emigration to Israel in 1981, the President of the Patronato, Dr. Jose Miller, has acted as chairman of the Coordinating Committee. As such he represents the Jewish community before the Oficina de Asuntos Religiosos, headed by Dr. Carneado, with whom he maintains friendly relations. He also joined the Consejo

Ecumenico de Cuba — the representative organization of the Protestant churches — in order to guarantee the Jewish community the same rights as their fellow Christians.

In a published interview Dr. Miller explained the difficult political problem facing the Jewish community in light of Cuba's hostility towards Israel. According to Dr. Miller, all the Jews in the diaspora identify with the State of Israel, that is, with its existence, but this does not imply that they have to defend all its governments. He stressed that Cuba had recognized the State of Israel and has never denied its right to exist, but its international position towards Israel is totally unfavorable. This has led people to assume erroneously that Cuba's attitude towards Israel is reflected internally. "The Cuban government had the tact, the delicacy, the sufficient intelligence and subtlety to separate one thing from the other. We had to respond to this attitude also with the same delicacy and the same subtlety. Our relations with the Cuban government are based exclusively on our faith, our culture, our right to Jewish identity."⁶²

It is obvious that the Jewish community has to separate between religious identity and politics in order to exist. It should be added that during her stay in Havana the author received the impression that the Cuban public is not necessarily affected by the hostile propaganda against Zionism, and that traditional sympathies towards Israel and the Jewish people have not disappeared and might come to the surface should Cuba change its Middle Eastern policy.

Conclusion

Observation of the present situation of the Cuban Jewish community indicate factors that might lead to its disappearance as well as others promising its continuity. Among the former, the most significant are trends of demographic decline: emigration, aging of the Jewish population, and assimilation. The lack of spiritual leadership, in particular of an ordained rabbi or *mohel*, is a serious obstacle to the preservation of the Jewish family. The poverty of Jewish educational and cultural activities cannot compete with those offered by the majority society. Jewish continuity is also threatened by the fear to identify with religious institutions, considered as a barrier to one's career. Whether imaginary or real, this fear seems to prevent a large number of governmentally-employed professionals from approaching the community.

The existence and functioning of the Jewish congregations are among the most important factors that strengthen the trends of continuity. With all their shortcomings, these institutions facilitate the provision of religious services and maintain an active Jewish social framework.

The Cuban government defends this institutional framework and facilitates its existence, and thus contributes to Jewish continuity.

Another important factor for continuity is the sense of identity with the Jewish people, existent not only among the older generation, but also among young people born and raised under the Revolution. Less fearful than their parents, they search for a form of Jewish identity that would suit their Cuban background. They seem less preoccupied with the conservation of the present institutions and more with the search for true sources of inspiration.

Notes

1. The first phase of Cuba's Liberation War (1868-1878) ended with a peace treaty between Spain and the rebel army (the Pact of Zanjón). In a dramatic encounter between Cuban General Antonio Maceo and the Spanish commander Martínez Campos, known as "the Protest of Baragua," the former refused to accept the terms of the treaty since it did not recognize the abolition of slavery (Maceo was black) and Cuba's independence.
2. José Martí (1853-1895): poet, thinker and writer; the apostle of Cuba's independence. See C.A.M. Hennessy, "The Roots of Cuban Nationalism," *International Affairs*, 39:3 (July 1963):345-359.
3. On Spain's and Cuba's immigration policy, see Duvon C. Corbitt, "Immigration in Cuba," *Hispanic America Historical Review*, 22 (1942):280-308.
4. The history of Cuban Jews under colonial Spain has still to be studied. Though outdated, the most comprehensive account is Max Kohler, "Los Judíos en Cuba," *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, XV (1920):125-129, based on the author's entry, "Cuba," in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* of 1903. See also Eduardo Weinfeld, "Cuba," *Encyclopedia Judaica Castellana* (Mexico, 1947); Leizer Ran, "Information and Data on 400 Years of Jewish Immigration to Cuba (1492-1948)," *Hemshej oif Kubaner Erd* (Havana, 1950), pp. 70-72 (Yiddish).
5. Lowry Nelson, *Rural Cuba* (Minneapolis, 1951), p. 175; Manuel Moreno Fragnals, "Iglesia e ingenio," *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*, V, 1-4 (1963):11-28.
6. Interviews: Jack Barrocas, Carmiel, 1983; Moisés Levin, Miami, 1984; Esther Mitrani *et al.*, Miami, 1984; José and Sol Credi, Miami, 1984; David Ilan, Beit Zera, 1983. Interviews are kept at the Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.
7. "Conversaciones con Frei Betto," *Fidel y la religión* (Havana, 1985), pp. 101, 107-108.
8. *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Constituyente de la Isla de Cuba*, Havana, 27 January 1901, p. 216; L. Bethel, "A Note on Church and the

- Independence of Latin America," *Cambridge History of Latin America*, III (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 223, 229-230.
9. Antonio Nunez Jimenez, *Geografia de Cuba* (Havana, 1959), p. 173.
10. M. Bejarano, "Antisemitism in Cuba during the Period of the Holocaust," *Yahadut Zemanenu*, V (Jerusalem, 1989):326-327 (Hebrew).
11. The implications of the Spanish Civil War on Cuban politics are analyzed in the profound essay of Alistair Hennessy, "Cuba," in M. Falcoff and F.B. Pike, eds., *The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, American Hemispheric Perspectives* (Lincoln, 1982), pp. 101-158.
12. An accurate appraisal of Cuba's balance of rescue appears in Ruth Zariz, *Rescue of German Jews through Emigration 1938-1945*, Doctoral Thesis, Hebrew University, p. 292 (Hebrew). On the history of the St. Louis, see Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died* (New York, 1968), pp. 270-288; Irving Gellman, "The St. Louis Tragedy," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (1971):144-156; Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts, *Voyage of the Damned* (Connecticut, 1974).
13. Comité Cubano Pro Palestina Hebrea, 2 de Noviembre 1917-1946; M. Bejarano, "Antisemitism in Cuba under Democratic, Military and Revolutionary Rule," *Patterns of Prejudice* (Summer 1990):32-33. The motives of Cuba's attitude in the United Nations General Assembly were analyzed by Ignacio Klich, "Cuba and the Partition of Palestine: A Contribution to the History of Latin America's Single 'No' to Jewish Statehood," unpublished manuscript.
14. Abraham J. Dubleman, "Cuba," *American Jewish Year Book*, LI (1950), pp. 260-264; "President Batista Lauds Cuba's Immigrants for Three Decades of Contribution," *Rescue* (Winter 1952), p. 15.
15. Interviews: Jose Lurie, Miami, 1984; Aron Yuken, Miami, 1987; Israel Luski, Miami, 1984; Bernardo Benes, Miami, 1987; Max Lesnick, Miami, 1984.
16. Joshua Hochstein, "20 Years Ago in Jewish Havana," *Havaner Lebn*, January 4 and 18, 1935 (Yiddish); David Blis, "Memories of Jewish Life in Havana," *Havaner Lebn*, November 22 and 29, 1935 (Yiddish); United Hebrew Congregation Temple Beth Israel, *Golden Anniversary 1906-1956* (Havana, 1956), pp. 4, 9-10.
17. George Weinberger, "The Jews in Cuba," *The American Hebrew*, February 8, 1918; Boris Sapir, *The Jewish Community of Cuba* (New York, 1948), pp. 14-15.
18. A. Misbir, "Cartas de Cuba", Israel, May 20, 1921; David Blis, "Memories," *Havaner Lebn*, May 29, 1936; Harry Viteles, "Report on the Status of the Jewish Immigration in Cuba" (February 1925), pp. 13, 21, 66-68 (typewritten).
19. Moises Mitrani, "De la Habana," *Israel* (Buenos Aires, August 1926).
20. According to Abraham Berezniak, Administrator of today's Adath Israel Congregation, five Jewish cemeteries still exist in Cuba: in Camaguey, Santa Clara, Camajuani, Banes, and the El Cobre cemetery in Santiago de Cuba.

21. On the early history of the Sephardic community of Cuban, see M. Bejarano, "Los sefaradim, pioneros de la inmigracion judia a Cuba," *Rumbos*, 14 (October 1985):107-122.
22. The most comprehensive source on the Eastern European Jewish immigrants for the years 1921-1925 is Harry Vitales' "Report," *op. cit.*; it is followed by a report by the Director of the Jewish Committee for Cuba, covering the years 1925-1927. (A copy of these reports is kept at the Department of Demography, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University.)
23. Sapir, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-31; Sender Kaplan, "Jews in Cuban Economic Life, *Havaner Lebn Almanaque* (1943):13-19 (Yiddish).
24. Sapir, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67; A. Eliezer, "The Jewish Worker and the Kultur Farain," *Oyfgang* (August-September 1934) (Yiddish).
25. "Acta de constitucion del Partido Comunista de Cuba," in Hortensia Pitchardo, *Documentos para la Historia de Cuba*, III (Havana, 1973), pp. 299-301; Boris Goldenberg, "The Rise and Fall of a Party, the Cuban CP (1925-1959)," *Problems of Communism* (July-August 1970):61-80.
26. Grobart refused to be interviewed by the author, claiming that he had never had contacts with the Jewish community. A book dedicated to Grobart on his 80th birthday does not mention his Hebrew name — Abraham Simchowitch. Fabio Grobart, *Un forjador eternamente joven* (Havana, 1985). See also Boris Kozolchyk, *The Political Biographies of Three Castro Officials* (Santa Monica, 1966), pp. 1-14; interviews: David Utiansky, Tel Aviv, 1981; Osher Schuchinsky, Miami, 1984.
27. Surveys on the Jewish institutions that functioned in Cuba are to be found in "The History of the Jews in Cuba," *Der Grundstein* (Havana, 1951), pp. 30-53 (Yiddish), as well as in the yearly *Almanaque de la Vida Habanera* (1943-1960).
28. For a history of the Zionist movement in Cuba, see Haim Shiniuk, "The Development of the Zionist Movement in Cuba," *Havaner Lebn Almanaque* (1943):131-147 (Yiddish).
29. Interviews: David Utiansky, Aron Yuken, Osher Schuchinsky, Eliezer Aronovsky. One example of the Zionist transformation was the director of the Jewish day school of the Centro Israelita who was formerly a Bundist; his attitude had its impact on the school's policy.
30. Rose Klepfisz and Emil Lang, *Annotated Catalogue of the Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1933-1944*, p. 192.
31. Thomas and Witts, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-81; Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 287-288.
32. Edward Hochhauser, "Report on Short Study of Situation of Refugees in Havana" (February 1939), JDC 506.
33. The number includes 922 on board the St. Louis, 132 on board the French "Flandre," and 72 on board the English "Orduna." For bibliography, see note 12 above.

34. Zariz, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-292. Interviews: N. Solowiejczyk, Tel Aviv, 1981; Paul and Maurice Kaufman, New York, 1987; Antonio Bergos, New York, 1987.
35. Interviews: Nahman Solowiejczyk; Chiel Morgenstein, New York, 1987. For literary accounts of refugee immigration from Belgium to Cuba, see Felicia Rosshandler, *Passing Through Havana* (New York, 1984); Yeshayahu Austridan, *Chofim* (Tel Aviv, 1985) (Hebrew).
36. Max Azicri, *Cuba Politics, Economics and Society* (London, 1988), p. 193.
37. Maurice Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 239. Interviews: Max Lesnick, Miami, 1984; Bernardo Benes, Miami, 1987. The most important activist of the Agrupacion Cultural was Marcus Matterin, editor of *Hebraica*, who founded and directed the Patronato's library until his death in 1983.
38. Kaplan to Malat, February 28, 1955; Kessari to Malat, March 14, 1955, Israel State Archives [ISA], 2578/21; Kessary Report on Visit to Cuba, October 26-31, 1955, ISA 2571/6; Consejo Plenario Sionista, *Cuba-Israel* (Havana, 1954).
39. Jorge Garcia Montes served during World War II as the lawyer of the JDC and was very devoted to the Jewish refugees. For a report on the inauguration ceremony, see *Prensa Libre*, October 25, 1955, pp. 1, 15.
40. Dionisio Castiel, "Una charla con el Arquitecto y los miembros del Comité de Construcción," *La Piedra Fundamental* (Der Gruntstein) (Havana, 1951), pp. 34-42.
41. Adath Israel and Knesseth Israel were reunited into one *kehilla* in 1948. After long inner struggles they split again — one group reorganizing Adath Israel and the second joining the Patronato.
42. Haim Yaari to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Report on the Condition of Cuban Jews," January 1964 (Hebrew). (A copy was given to this author by Haim Yaari, Israel's Ambassador to Cuba in 1963-65.) For other causes for emigration from Cuba, see Moises Asis, "Cuban Jewry during Thirty Years of Revolution," *Yahadut Zemanenu*, 6 (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 326 (Hebrew). (The Spanish version of the article was published in *Coloquio*, 22 [Buenos Aires, 1989].)
43. Bejarano, *Patterns of Prejudice*, *op. cit.*, p. 40; Halperin, *op. cit.*, p. 242. Interview: Moshe Baldas, Tel Aviv, 1982.
44. Interview: Moshe Baldas; Yaari, "Report," *op. cit.*
45. According to Dr. Jonathan Prato, Israel's Ambassador to Cuba 1960-63, the arrangement was achieved following his petition to the Cuban Secretary of Education.
46. Interview: Moshe Baldas.
47. Edy Kaufman, Yoram Shapira, Joel Barromi, *Israel-Latin American Relations* (New Brunswick, 1959), pp. 10-12; Halperin, *op. cit.*, 241-244; David J. Kopilow, *Castro, Israel and the PLO* (The Cuba-American National Foundation, 1984), p. 17. Ricardo Subirana y Lobo (Richard

Wolf) was a German Jewish chemist who settled in Cuba and was a generous supporter of the revolutionary movement; he is the founder of the Wolf Fund (see "Ricardo Wolf," *Ma'ariv*, May 12, 1988).

48. Halperin, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-254; Azicri, p. 193; Kopilow, pp. 17-26.
49. Asis, pp. 334-336; interview with Moshe Baldas.
50. A collection of cartoons against Begin may be found in David Kopilow, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.
51. M. Abbas (Abu Mazzen), *La otra cara: la verdad de las relaciones secretas entre el nazismo y el sionismo* (Havana, 1987).
52. Asis, pp. 336-337.
53. Kopilow, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
54. Azicri, p. 193-194.
55. Carmelo Alvarez, *Cuba, testimonios y vivencias de un proceso revolucionario* (San Jose, 1989), in particular the interview with Carneado, pp. 19-48. Interviews: M. Baldas; Jose Miller, Havana, 1990.
56. The following section is based mainly on observations made during the author's visit to Havana (October 5-November 4, 1990).
57. Asis, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-329.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Interview with Abraham Berezniak.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Membership fees are 1 peso per month; Adath Israel has 150 listed members and the Patronato 120 (data supplied by Miller and Berezniak).
62. "Jose Miller," in Carmelo Alvarez, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.